



# Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
THURSDAY, JUNE 24, 2004  
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## **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES NEW VIOLENT CRIME REDUCTION INITIATIVE**

### ***15 Communities to Receive Violent Crime Impact Teams***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Attorney General John Ashcroft, Deputy Attorney General James Comey, and Carl J. Truscott, Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, announced a new federal initiative aimed at reducing crime in fifteen U.S. communities. This initiative has placed teams consisting of ATF Agents, U.S. Marshals, DEA agents and federal prosecutors in each selected city over the past several weeks. The goal of the program, called VCIT, or Violent Crime Impact Teams, is to have the ATF-led teams work with local law enforcement to identify and arrest the most violent offenders in each city.

The identified communities include: Albuquerque, NM; Baltimore, MD; Chattanooga, TN; Tampa, FL; Miami, FL; Richmond, VA; Greensboro, NC; Tulsa, OK; Pittsburgh, PA; Las Vegas, NV; Columbus, OH; Philadelphia, PA; Los Angeles, CA; Tucson, AZ; and the Washington, D.C./Northern Virginia region.

“The violent-crime rate has plunged to the lowest level in 30 years, but we view these impressive results as just the beginning. We are determined to drive down violent crime everywhere—especially in those places where habitual offenders are concentrated and communities live in fear of the violent and predatory,” said Attorney General John Ashcroft. “Our goal is to make an immediate impact in these communities by targeting repeat offenders with tough prosecutions, and tough sentences. The Violent Crime Impact Teams will shift the balance of power in crime-plagued neighborhoods away from habitual offenders and toward the law-abiding citizens who live and work there.”

The 15 cities were selected after examining a number of factors, including recent homicide and violent crime numbers, and the opportunity for law enforcement to make a significant difference in the community. In some of the targeted cities, crime rates have gone up and the VCIT teams aim to reduce that trend. In some cities, however, the crime rate has decreased. In those areas, the teams will focus on continuing and strengthening that trend.

As part of VCIT, federal agents from ATF, DEA, and U.S. Marshals Service have been assigned to each city for a period of approximately six months. A federal prosecutor from the Department of Justice will accompany each team in many of the selected cities to handle the prosecutions of those arrested.

“The goals of the VCIT initiative,” said ATF Director Truscott, “are to decrease, within six months, the number of homicides, number of firearms related to homicides, number of violent crimes and number of violent firearms crimes. By applying our broad experience and unique expertise in combating gun crime, ATF and its partners will remove violent criminals from the community and help restore those communities into safe and desirable places to live and work.”

The VCIT initiative takes a six-point approach to reducing violent crime:

- ! Use technology and human intelligence to identify geographic areas within 15 cities with violent firearms crime
- ! Identify and target the worst violent offenders, the criminal organizations that support them, and determine how many of them are armed career criminals
- ! Use criminal investigations as well as investigative tools and resources to disrupt and dismantle criminal activity being perpetrated by the targeted individuals and organizations
- ! Arrest and prosecute the targeted individuals and their associates in the federal or state jurisdiction that lends itself to the most appropriate penalty
- ! Work with community leaders to cultivate solid and sustained commitment between the community’s residents and law enforcement
- ! Evaluate results on a monthly basis to assess VCIT progress toward achieving the initiative’s goals

VCIT has been designed to work in conjunction with Project Safe Neighborhoods, a comprehensive nationwide strategy geared toward combating gun crime in communities across the country. VCIT builds on the success of PSN, but adds additional resources to the target cities.

Under Project Safe Neighborhoods, the number of federal firearms prosecutions increased 68 percent in the past three years. In FY 2003, the Justice Department filed more than 10,500 federal firearms cases, the highest number ever recorded by the Justice Department. Since its inception in 2001, more than \$1 billion has been devoted to the implementation of PSN. This money has been used to hire additional prosecutors, provide training, hire research and community support staff, as well as to develop and promote effective prevention and deterrence efforts.

Paul Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, said, “Tucson, Arizona, is fortunate to be one of the cities selected to participate in this program. We know from experience that targeted investigations and focused prosecutions of habitual offenders reduces the incidence of violent crime. The goal of this effort is to make a difference in the lives of the this community and to send a clear message to violent offenders in Tucson. We don’t want you here.”

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Release No: 2004-117